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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA, EUR/WE AND S/I

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [IT](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ: ITALY REMAINS COMMITTED ON ALL FRONTS, BUT CONCERNED ABOUT POLITICAL PROCESS

REF: A. STATE 158420

- [1](#)B. ROME 2885
- [1](#)C. ROME 2349
- [1](#)D. ROME 2348
- [1](#)E. ROME 1484
- [1](#)F. ROME 902
- [1](#)G. ROME 1635

Classified By: DCM Anna Borg for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Though Italian leaders publicly praised the signing of the new Iraqi constitution (Ref B), MFA officials privately told us they have deep cause for concern, especially regarding what they perceive as the lack of inclusiveness of all ethnic groups in the political process. However, Italy remains firmly committed on all fronts: militarily, politically, and economically. MFA officials are contemplating new reconstruction strategies aimed at promoting national reconciliation and requested more consultations with US officials to brainstorm on the way ahead, with UNGA presenting a possible first opportunity. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) DCM and PolOff delivered Ref A demarche to MFA Director General for the Mediterranean and Middle East Riccardo Sessa and Iraq Task Force Director Luigi Maccotta on September 1. Describing the situation in Iraq as "one of the worst" in the region, Sessa distinguished between public comments and reality. At the public level, he said, it was necessary to hail the draft constitution as an historic achievement and a success story. Privately, however, he said, we must be realistic and admit that the results so far are not totally satisfactory. Sessa cited the lack of unity among ethnic groups -- the "inclusiveness factor" -- as the main challenge facing Iraq. Maccotta agreed, saying that although Italy hoped the political timetable laid out by the TAL would work, it was now clear that it might not, and the focus now should be on preserving the political process -- which he thought was more important than any focus on specific dates. To do this, we need to help create a "national reconciliation," he said, by encouraging more dialogue among Iraqis.

[1](#)3. (C) Noting that Italy had supported the military intervention against Saddam Hussein, then provided troops for peacekeeping purposes immediately after the hostilities ended, and today is the third largest contingent in Iraq, Sessa said Italy needs a success story to show its highly skeptical public that helping the Iraqis was the right decision. To make that success story happen, he said, we need to enter into a new phase of Iraq reconstruction aimed at building a national identity. One idea might be to hold informal gatherings of representatives from different groups, though he admitted this would be easier said than done. He added that FM Zebari, during his recent visit to Italy, was fairly positive about the constitution but very critical of the Sunni component, which he said lacked unified leadership and good leaders.

[1](#)4. (C) Sessa said the three main coalition partners (US, UK, and Italy) need to engage in deep consultations on a strategy to help build this national reconciliation. Noting the usefulness of past discussions with former Senior Advisor and Iraq Policy Coordinator Ambassador Richard Jones (Refs C, D, E), Maccotta said that longer and more frequent consultations would be useful. He suggested a "closed door brainstorming" session with new S/I Jeffrey to discuss the way ahead. Meanwhile, Italy is doing its part to assist with the reconstruction process, Sessa said, and will soon host two two-week training sessions, one for spokespersons from various Iraqi ministries, and one for women in civil society.

[1](#)5. (C) Sessa also reconfirmed Italy's troop commitment in Iraq, saying, "leaving Iraq now would be leaving it in chaos." He added that Iraqi FM Zebari had stressed privately to FM Fini that sending the wrong public message on troop withdrawals or reconfiguration of contingents only helps the insurgents. (Note. At the September 1 NATO KFOR change of command ceremony in Pristina, Defense Minister Martino did speak of reconfiguration, confirming that the expected

withdrawal of 300 troops announced by PM Berlusconi last March (Refs F and G) had already started, but stressed that the increased Iraqi security capabilities made it possible

for the Italians to continue performing their mission with fewer troops. Martino also criticized opposition leader Prodi's comments as irresponsible for calling Italy's troops occupation forces and calling for their immediate withdrawal. End note.)

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